

Hello, my name is Elizabeth Charash and I am a junior history major, who is pursuing a double minor in human rights and public policy and I am originally from Newtown. Thank you committee members for your continued support of the university and your time today.

I was unaware to the extent UConn had impacted my life until I was talking with a high school friend about why she should come to UConn herself.

The first thought that popped into my head was my study abroad experience with the UConn in Cape Town program. Not only did I live with an incredible cohort of co-educators, but I worked one-on-one with community members in a high gang violence zone, engaging in conversations about their lives and experiences. One of the women I met, Sharne, was the same age as me and the only woman to graduate from her couple hundred person high school class. She did not have access to higher education like me. While I was able to elect to study abroad in South Africa, she was dodging bullets and unemployment. And yet she got up everyday to look for work, to learn something new, to do something to keep herself academically active and informed.

If I had not met Sharne or my other friends in Hanover Park, the community where I was working, I would not have a fraction of the knowledge or inspiration or empathetic capacity to learn more about urban gun violence.

Before heading to South Africa, I had planned to apply for the UConn IDEA Grant, a university funded, self-directed research project. As a student originally from Newtown, I had a pre-existing interest in gun violence prevention research. My time in Hanover Park opened my eyes to the unequal treatment of gun violence victims in urban and suburban areas. After being awarded the UConn IDEA Grant and with the support of my research professor, I spent the summer immersing myself in literature about gun violence.

In addition to study abroad and my research, I have received incredible opportunities through the Honors program and the Special Program in Law. I also write for the Daily Campus, our school paper, and am an active member of UConn Moot Court. These organizations have increased my writing, critical thinking and leadership skills, and have allowed for me to find incredible life-long friends.

But, this is where the state legislature comes in. Community. These opportunities I have experienced are only because of the affordable tuition UConn currently offers and the state support that enables the high caliber faculty and staff, the wide range of programs and outlets for students' minds and hearts. If we are to address the problems the state, nation and world currently face, we need UConn to receive the state funding it requires.

The people I have had the honor of speaking with today and myself are the next people who will run for office, teach future students, manage top businesses, solve the next epidemics and engineer the next great inventions, to name just a few. UConn is helping to create these leaders but cannot complete the task without state funding. I strongly urge you to restore funding for the students of today and of tomorrow and for all of the residents of Connecticut. Thank you for your time.